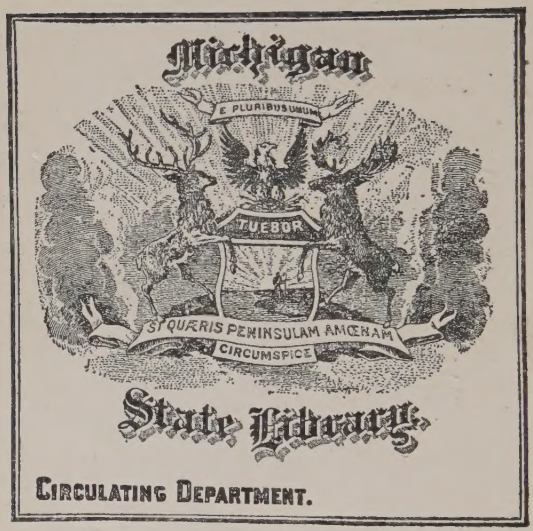

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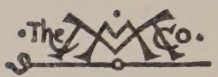

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THE ANCIENT BEAUTIFUL THINGS

BY

Mrs FANNIE STEARNS DAVIS Gifford, 1884

(MRS. A. McK. GIFFORD)

New York

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1923

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I

THE ANCIENT BEAUTIFUL THINGS

I AM all alone in the room.
The evening stretches before me
Like a road all delicate gloom
Till it reaches the midnight's gate.
And I hear his step on the path,
And his questioning whistle, low
At the door as I hurry to meet him.

He will ask, 'Are the doors all locked?
Is the fire made safe on the hearth?
And she—is she sound asleep?'

I shall say, 'Yes, the doors are locked,
And the ashes are white as the frost:
Only a few red eyes
To stare at the empty room.
And she is all sound asleep,
Up there where the silence sings,
And the curtains stir in the cold.'

He will ask, 'And what did you do
While I have been gone so long?
So long! Four hours or five!'
I shall say, 'There was nothing I did.—

I mended that sleeve of your coat.
And I made her a little white hood
Of the furry pieces I found
Up in the garret to-day.
She shall wear it to play in the snow,
Like a little white bear—and shall laugh,
And tumble, and crystals of stars
Shall shine on her cheeks and hair.—
It was nothing I did.—I thought
You would never come home again!'

Then he will laugh out, low,
Being fond of my folly, perhaps;
And softly and hand in hand
We shall creep upstairs in the dusk,
To look at her, lying asleep:
Our little gold bird in her nest;
The wonderful bird who flew in
At the window our life flung wide.

(How should we have chosen her,
Had we seen them all in a row,
The unborn vague little souls,
All wings and tremulous hands?
How should we have chosen her,
Made like a star to shine,
Made like a bird to fly,
Out of a drop of our blood,
And earth, and fire, and God?)

Then we shall go to sleep,
Glad.—
O God, did you know
When you moulded men out of clay,
Urging them up and up
Through the endless circles of change,
Travail and turmoil and death,
Many would curse you down,
Many would live all gray
With their faces flat like a mask?
But there would be some, O God,
Crying to you each night,
'I am so glad! so glad!
I am so rich and gay!
How shall I thank you, God?'

Was that one thing you knew
When you smiled and found it was good:
The curious teeming earth
That grew like a child at your hand?
Ah, you might smile, for that!—

I am all alone in the room.
The books and the pictures peer,
Dumb old friends, from the dark.
The wind goes high on the hills,
And my fire leaps out, being proud.
The terrier, down on the hearth,
Twitches and barks in his sleep,

Soft little foolish barks,
More like a dream than a dog.—

I will mend the sleeve of that coat,
All ragged—and make her the hood,
Furry, and white, for the snow.
She shall tumble and laugh.—
Oh, I think,
Though a thousand rivers of grief
Flood over my head,—though a hill
Of horror lie on my breast,—
Something will sing, 'Be glad!
You have had all your heart's desire:
The unknown things that you asked
When you lay awake in the nights,
Alone, and searching the dark
For the secret wonder of life.
You have had them (can you forget?),
The ancient beautiful things!' . . .

How long he is gone! And yet
It is only an hour or two. . . .

Oh, I am so happy! My eyes
Are troubled with tears.
Did you know,
O God, they would be like this,
Your ancient beautiful things?
Are there more? Are there more—out there?—
O God, are there always more?

II

DAFFODILS

I PLANTED daffodils to-day
  Down in the garden-beds.
Brown were the hills. The sky was gray.
  The birch-trees bowed their heads.

My hands were cold, but I was glad.
  I digged and sang. For me
The barren frosty beds went mad
  With golden glamoury.

Above each brown and broken space
  Green leafy daggers gleamed.
Like spirits, flames for wing and face,
  The blossoms blew and dreamed.

Blue-birds, and earth-scent, and the sun,—
  O April, far away,
I felt your wild green waters run
  Across my heart to-day!

And underneath my heart a song
  Too shy for many words
Wavered and whispered, long and long,
  Like sleepy crooning birds:—

'And when the brown beds leap with gold,
And April hazes drift,
Your arms shall have strange joy to hold,
A strange sweet load to lift:—

'Younger than sun and blue-bird's cry,
Dearer than daffodils—'
—Oh, should I not be glad, gray sky!
Be glad, wise waiting hills!

YOU SHALL NOT WEAR VELVET

You shall not wear velvet,
  Nor silken broidery.
But brown things, and straight things,
  That leave your body free.

You shall not have playthings
  That men have wrought for gold,
But shells and stones and sea-weeds,
  And nuts by squirrels sold.

Your friends shall be the tall wind,
  The river, and the tree;—
The sun that laughs and marches;
  The swallows, and the sea.

Your prayers shall be the whisper
  Of grasses in the rain:
The song of wild wood-thrushes
  That make God glad again.

And you shall run and wander,
  And you shall dream and sing
Of brave things and bright things
  Beyond the swallow's wing.

And you shall envy no man,
  Nor hurt your heart with sighs,
For I will keep you simple
  That God may make you wise!

ECHO-FINGERS

When you were one hour old
  They brought you back to me.
You were a queer red crying one,
  But dear as life to me.

Dear—but how new and strange!
  You could not be my own!
I thought, "She is so wonderful.
  But helplessly alone.

"Alone she leaps to life.—
  How shall I understand?"
And then they laid against my cheek
  Your little curled dream-hand.

And oh, it was my hand!
  My fingers, one hour old!
The crooked thumbs, the odd blunt tips,
  Turned frail as flowers to hold.

Then you were mine at last:
  My echo!—And I knew
That all myself and all of life
  Lay curled like flames in you!

I DID NOT LONG FOR CHILDREN

I did not long for children, as I know
Most women long, hungry and jealous,—wild
Just for the touch and trouble of a child
Against their hearts.
I thought that I should go
Gypsying down my life, foot-free, and happier so.

I thought it would be always good to fly;
I should not need a hearth for sitting by,
A fire to warm my hands, a haunting face
To lure me home to any prisoned place
Of needy love and clamor. I would die
Without desire for these. . . .

Ah, here am I!
Hugging you fast, strange little helpless star,
Fallen to me from space so clear, so far,
I never coursed it in a dream. For now
It seems I only live to tend you, bow
My freedom to your yoke of each hour's need:
Forget for you my sparkling leagues of speed,—
Winds, hill-tops, passionate seas and stars and
suns. . . .

I run to you as some wild mother runs,
Trembling to hold from any hurt of storm
This round head, and this body, curled and warm.
I who desired you not, but would go free,
Am held unfluttering in your frail soft hand.
And no dull happy woman in the land
For loving,—loving,—can keep pace with me!

I SEW THE DREAMS MY YEARS GIVE BACK

I sew the dreams my years give back
  Into your small white dress.
Ah, never a least dream shall you lack
  Of wandering loveliness!

To you I give all lost delight,
  All breathless laughter, and surprise . . .
But oh, the sword to help you fight
  Beyond my giving lies!

To help you fight, when strife must be,
  Only yourself and God avail.
The dreams that are so dear to me,
  How frail for you!—How frail!—

But far from us that day, too black.
  Far, far, its hurt and heaviness.
I sew the dreams my years give back
  Into your small white dress. . . .

'NOW YOU CAN SPEAK TO ME'

Now you can speak to me, and sing
  Queer little whispering songs that seem
Stolen from some fine fairy thing
  You heard the stars say in a dream.

Now you can call me by my name,
  And laugh at me, and comfort me;
As if myself in echo came
  And leaned, bright-haired, against my knee,

And touched my eyes, and smoothed my cheek,
  And gave me clear keen sudden words.—
And one year since you could not speak
  Save the sweet jargonning of birds!

How have you learned these subtle things,
  Who trot on reckless baby-feet?
Does your blue smock hide small white wings
  That take you skimming down Heaven's street,

And bring you lightly back to me
  With that gay wisdom on your face?—
—Are you a dream Eternity
  Has lent me in a baby's place?—

'ONLY WHILE YOU SLEEP'

Only while you sleep
In the cool shuttered room,
While the gay child-dreams leap
Across your eyelids' gloom,—

Only while you rest
From your quaint birdlike quest;
While the sweet ceaseless bubble
Of wonder stills its trouble,
And the wild hands and feet
Lie languid,—may I meet
The friends that came of old,
Wingèd, and keen, and cold,
Friends of my lonely brain.

My tryst with these is vain
While you dance round me. Oh,
Long as your years ago
I knew it would be so.

For thoughts and dreams are cold
When a child's hand can hold
The heart . . . You are the best . . .

And yet, O loveliest,—
Sleep tight, an hour or two!
Let those old friends tread through
The tangled gate; and bring
High starlit counseling:—
Not warm and close as you,
But straight, and sharp, and true. . . .
Then when you call me back,
Shall I not come, more wise,
More loving for your lack,—
Curved cheeks, and great glad eyes? . . .

And, dreamer,—shall not you
Love me for dreaming too? . . .

'I SING NO MORE'

I sing no more the brook-song, the tree-song?
I sing no more the tune of the windy hills?
I have forgotten, perhaps, the storm-song, the sea-song?
How a red dawn dazzles, and how a blue noon thrills?

—Ah, but my songs! A little gay echo sings them.
A little gay face comes laughing, stealing my flush of flame.
I have forgotten no tunes, but the thrush or the thunder brings them
Perfect and undismayed, for the little gay lips to tame.

I go no more a-dancing and a-glittering?
I go no more in queer bright garments clad?
I have forgotten, perhaps, the dreams that the moon sets flittering,
Silver and gold and pearl-plumed; delicate, moody, sad?

—Ah, but my dance!—A little gay shadow treads it,

Green and azure and copper, a little shape leaps,
bright-haired.
I have forgotten no dream, but the star or the sun-
rise sheds it,
Utterly young and fearless, with tremulous hot
heart bared.

Why should I sing? And why should I dream and
desire?
Not one night will wait for my dream; not one day
for my song.
I am the speechless wood that laughs in the keen
young fire.
O little wayward fire! Burn gloriously! Burn
long!

TO REBECCA GROWING UP

Light in your eyes says 'Years! Years!'—
There grows more reason in your tears.
There grows more pity in your smile.
Dreams beset you and beguile.

The round clear baby cheek seems thin,
Though still it holds the dimples in.
Your lashes droop. Sometimes you look
A changeling from a fairy-book.
Soon you will see as straight as I,
And need no more to tease and ply
My patience, asking. You will know
Without my clumsy, 'This is so.'

Moods sweep you. Seasons sway you. Soon
You will turn fey beneath the moon,
And delicately mad with spring.
Bird-passage sets you on the wing;
Leaf-fall casts shadows on your heart;
Red sun-rise makes you laugh and start. . . .

Could I have loved you so, when you
Wrapped in sweet blankets white and blue,
Round-eyed, damp-curled, dimpled and dazed,
Met the world's wonder,—blank, amazed?—

Then you were mine,—all mine. Ah yes!
But only mine from helplessness.

Now you out-run me. Dream for dream
You match me. Challenges that gleam
Like little swords dance through our days.
. . . Oh, what am I to blame or praise?
To trust you is a thing more rare
Than that old darling speechless care.

And can you trust me?—You, who run
So soon beyond my steadfast sun?
And can you trust me?—You, who go
So soon a road I cannot know?—

III

RED SEED

Now perhaps there is Peace . . .
But dare you say that you know it? . . .
The wind caught a wild red seed,
And is wild to blow it
Far . . . far . . . far . . . .
Over crags, soft pastures, dead sands.
It will plunge and leap to a fire
In white frozen and hot green lands.

The wind will fan it, and fan it.
The fierce red stems will flash.
For the secret seed that began it
Is flame . . . sheer flame . . . without ash.

So it will snatch and devour.
And only God knows when
He will reap its rank red flower
Lest it bite and burn all men.

Now perhaps there is Peace.
But dare you dream that you know it? . . .
The wind caught a wild red seed . . .
He will blow it . . . and blow it . . . and blow it. . . .

UNCLE FRAZAR

All my life he has been my comrade and friend.

He is very tall and straight, in a big blue coat
With many brass buttons, with eagles on them. His belt
Has an eagle-buckle. His hand at the sword-hilt rests
Quietly always.—He looks out, and looks out.
His forehead is broad and smooth, and his eyes are blue
Like the eyes of sailors.
His mouth is sweet
Like a girl's, but firmer than iron. His hair tossed back
Has a windy ruffle, half boyish.
He is of those
Who are always young; though I think he died
At Newbern, leading a charge.
He was twenty-two. . . .

They said that he most loved music. He used to play
In the dark, tempestuous, troubled and lovely things,

In the parlor, there in the big old house on the hill.
Or up in his room by the apple-tree, he would make
His flute sing out, high, joyous and keen.
And then
He would hide in his queer little laboratory under the eaves
And juggle with flasks and retorts, being curious-souled
For the secrets of air and fire. . . .

All my life he has been my comrade and friend;
And I have not asked him to open those sweet stern lips.
But now, I wish that he could.

He could tell me whether all beautiful kindly things
Must drown in the red-hot stinging whirlpool of change,
Or live forever. (As he has lived on for me.)

He could tell me things that I need to know about Life
And Death,—for he knows, as once
He knew strange secrets of music, and air, and fire.
And he has had many years to be young and wise
Since he fell at Newbern, shouting, "Go on! I'm shot!"

Perhaps if it foams too close (that whirlpool, red hot),
He will lift his hand from the sword-hilt, and touch my hand,
And open his lips, and tell me things that I need . . .

For all my life he has been my comrade and friend. . . .

DEATH IN THE SUN

A warm gold shining world.
A whispering, laughing world. . . .
You would not think that Death stands there in the sun,
Leaning against the posts of the red-brick house,
Leaning across the bright brass knocker and knob and bell. . . .

A warm gold shining world,
And crocuses up in the lawn. . . .

If Death were not so thin
Like air or water or gas
He would darken the smooth white door.
He would stain the little square gleaming window-lights dull gray.
But he is so clear and thin
That they glitter and sparkle and dance. . . .

. . . She was young, and her cheeks were red.
She was young, and loved laughing and gossip.
She wore coral-color, and sapphire, and violet;
And hats with feathers that knew how to trick you to staring;

And shoes high-heeled, quick, dainty.
She did not think much. She was gay.
No one will say 'She is dead.'

The crocuses out in the lawn,
White and purple and orange candles,
Windless and warm and safe,
Burn the brown soil with beauty. . . .

No one will say 'She is dead'.
Yet Death stands there in the sun. . . .

WILD THORN

Wild,—wild,—wild!—
You, at an office desk?—
A thistle you are; a barberry bough; a rose with sharp red thorns.

Wild thorn, what are you doing?
You have no right to be here.
You, to make lists and tap off numbers and dates!
You, to turn over files,—dust and dead bones and straw!
You, to answer 'Hello—hello—', your voice
Smoothed and flattened to civil colorless tones.
You, with the hand-cuff of hours
Clamped on your wrists. . . .
Wild thorn,
If you stay in this office long
We shall all grow wilder than you.

You bring us the mountain-pool,
Bright surfy sea-reaches, sky-bound pasture and moor.
The city, the shops, the banks, seem so much smothering muck.

. . . I shall send you away some day.
Pay you and tell you to go.
I wonder if you will know why.
You are dangerous here as strong drink.

. . . Get a bronze and scarlet cloak,
Rose-hips, barberries! . . . Run
At autumn sunset on hills that are jagged with fire!
Get a colt half-broken, and ride
Like mad on the hard gold beach and violet moors!

. . . Wild,—wild,—wild,—
You prick me with every glance.

Thistle of fierce young leaves,
Bramble white-blossomed, red-spiked,
Rose with a hot gold heart,
Wild thorn, wild thorn,
Go!

AFTERNOON

Some one is coming to call.

Up the red brick path between daffodils dancing
I see white ruffles that blow:
A parasol, dipping against the sun.
It is some one stout, and warm in her new white gloves.

My old green apron is smudged with the garden-mould.
My hands are the hands of a peasant-woman. My hair
Comes tumbling down into my eyes.

I wish I could lie down flat like a child
And hide in the grass, while she rings and rings,
And sticks her card under the door with a sigh,
And puffs away down the path.
I wish—
But the parasol bobs,
And she bobs like a mandarin's lady,
Smiling and bridling and beckoning.

—If I were a daffodil, in an apron of green and gold—

But there she stands on the path.
And her gloves are so new that they squeak with newness and stoutness
And I know she will talk of the weather and stay an hour.

—If I were a daffodil—
Or a little cool blinking bug
Down in the daffodil leaves—

THE PUPIL RETURNS TO HIS MASTER

It is because they troubled me
I am come back to you.
They would not leave my eyelids free
To stare at the noon's high blue.

They would not let my ears escape
Their clack and clamoring.
They would not let my dreams take shape
To one clear lovely thing.

They talked to me, and talked to me,
And sat up close, and stared.
I would have cast them in the sea,
Or choked them, had I dared.

But they were kind; and hurting seems
A childish hatefulness. . . .
All that I need now are my dreams,
Quiet and comradeless. . . .

Oh, I will work my hands to bone,
And sew my lids with thorns,
For you, who leave me all alone
As the moon's polished horns!

Oh, I will serve you like a slave,—
Because you know that I
Must keep alone, alone, to save
The soul you taught to fly!

QUAINT

It is quaint to scuttle home
For three drops of rain;
Lest, like paintless houses,
We catch a weather-stain.

It is quaint to be afraid
Of freezing ugly toes;
To hide in furry luxury
A thing like a nose.

When you think that we shall lie
Tight in the ground
Fifty years,—a hundred years,—
And till the stars turn round,—

Not abashed by glacial floods,
Nor frost that cleaves all stones,—
It is quaint to take such care
Of our skin and bones!

TIRED

No. . . . Do not ask me to be wise.
I have no thoughts at all.
Only that life is swift, and flies
Shadow-like, strange, and small. . . .

Only, that I am less than dew,
And frailer than a fern. . . .
I have forgotten all I knew
Of certainty. To learn

This much is harder than I guessed.
I will not pass for wise.
I am too tired for a quest;
Too sleepy for surmise.

PITY

I wore a coat I made myself
  Of brown forgotten stuff.
The shoes on my feet were dim with dust,
  My gloves were creased and rough.

The hat on my head was a gypsy thing,
  Stuck with a blue-jay's quill.
And there you stood and stared at me. . . .
  I feel you staring still.

I was too glad to pity you;
  But oh, you pitied me!
From gleaming plume to glossy shoe
  You shamed me gorgeously!

Had I been candle-wax, I vow
  I should have run, and run!
But pity is a comic thing
  To waste on such an one.

For could you go as I can go
  Singing through dust and dew,—
Singing, because, deep down, I hoard
  Treasure you never knew?

No one at all of those I love
Would change your face for mine.
I need but cross the sill to-night
To make them laugh and shine.

They like the coat I made myself.
They like my quill's torn blue. . . .
Oh, humble as I am with love,—
How I could pity you!

DREAMS BEHIND DOORS

It is as if the kitchen door
  Sheltered a prickling dream. . . .
As if the mop and dust-pan wore
  Some unrelated gleam.

As if, down hall and over stair,
  A silver secret blew.
. . . But I am much too dull to dare
  Affirm my dream is true.

I have no time to hunt it out,
  Nor quite enough desire. . . .
But never think I work without
  Its folly and its fire!

HANDS

I learned a garden's use when I
Was just a scarlet poppy high.
I learned to fiddle crooked things
When I had curls that teased the strings.
My hands made merry all my youth
With half-adventures out towards truth;
For I was happiest to swing
A brush, or make a hammer ring;
And my ten fingers seemed to know
Ten separate joys, they tingled so.

Now in the garden in the sun
My days unhazarded must run.
Upstairs and down again I go
A little hesitant and slow.

But life has been too kind to cry
Tears at its slackening. And I
Thank God each quiet-footed hour
For eyes' delight and hands' least power
Of trowel, needle, brush or clay:—
The little crafts, half work, half play.

I find it good that garden-loam
Can keep frail faded hands at home;
That tired eyes can still make bold
With blue and emerald and gold:—
With elfin youth's bright windy smocks,
And feathery crests for fairy locks.

Surely my youth made dim surmise
Of this dull season, and was wise
To urge my hands' adventurings
Through all my spirit's flights and flings!
Surely it guessed my need at length
Not only of love's hoarded strength,
But of each lesser fond device
To warm away years' gathering ice. . . .

Ah, Heaven,—remembering these things,—
Give me wise hands as well as wings!

MOON

Where did the Moon go? . . .
  Under the hill
She sleeps in a pool
  That blue shadows fill . . .
She sleeps in a depth
  Of weedy gloom,
With silver scarves
  To curtain her room.

She will not wake
  Till Day at the brink
Leans, and shivers,
  Too drowsed to drink
Of the blue, blue shadows . . .
  Then will she rise
And burn like a bird
  In the blank white skies!

OH, NEVER LEAVE YOUR DOOR UNLATCHED

Oh, never leave your door unlatched
  When you go out by night,
Lest a star come in and freeze your fire
  With her long-fingered light.

Oh, never leave your door unlatched
  When you go out by day,
Lest the sun come in, and your cold spring
  Be scorched and sucked away.

For frosty things and blazing things
  And things that fly and hide
Have crafty ways of visiting
  A door that swings too wide.

Oh, never leave your door unlatched
  Except for me!—for me!—
And not one wild-tongued skyey thing
  Shall laugh and flame as we!

FEET OR WINGS

O tethered spirit, take for mate
No swallow-winged and windy one:
No wanderer strange and passionate
Beyond the strong-holds of the sun.

And, winged one,—beware that thou
Cast out to stars no earth-bound child,
Loving the hearth-smoke and the bough
Of lilac more than flight too wild.

Choose loneliness, before the slow
Torture of twisted leashing-strings.
Love should not be too blind to know
If the beloved has feet,—or wings!—

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

Now my thick years bend your back.
Cut the thongs that hold the pack
Merrily, merrily.

I will not be sad again.
I will strip myself of pain,
And go singing as of old.
Though my hands are thin to hold,
Though my hair is pale as sand,
And I shiver as I stand,
I am not so short of breath
As to strangle you to death. . . .

Why should you go crook'd for me?
Shake yourself and run! run free!
No. It's long enough you ache
Borrowing years for my stiff sake.
No. I do not need you now. . . .
Toss the wild hair from your brow:
Run! while roads and city-smoke
Beckon young dream-worthy folk.
Why should I be lonely? See,
The old sun shines to comfort me,

And the small old hours dance
Lovely with all lost romance.
I have needed time to dream:—
But you must run, and grow, and gleam,
Merrily! Merrily!

And if you come back to find
No one here but sun and wind,
Think, "He did not fail away
Cringing like a beast at bay,
But like an eagle or a star,
Lost by flying far,—so far!"

(God forgive me if I lie . . .
All I love in life, good-bye. . . .)

Look! the long road and the sky!
Merrily! Merrily! . .

'AND IF YOUR SHOES WERE CURLY GOLD'

And if your shoes were curly gold,
  And if your cap wore a sea-gull's feather,
You could not fly more bright and bold
  Through the blue sunshine-sprinkled weather.

But if your heart were a jade-green stone,
  And if your soul were a gray smoke-quiver,
You could not leave me more alone,
  To hug cold dreams and to wake a-shiver.

Oh, not my prayers, though they ache like wounds,
  Can call you down from your frosty flying.
You hear in Heaven wild lovely sounds,—
  While I hear only my heart's long crying. . . .

AS IN A PICTURE-BOOK

My mother died when I was young,
  Yet not too young to know
What terror round the dark halls clung
  That aching day of snow.

I knew she could not comfort me.
  I sat there all alone.
Cold sorrow held me quietly
  Dumb as a winter stone.

And yet I seemed to watch it all
  As in a picture-book:
The silent people in the hall,
  My father's frozen look,—

The heaped white roses, and my dress
  So very black and new.
I watched it without weariness. . . .
  Ah, how the snow-blast blew! . . .

* * * * * * * *

Tonight, you say you love me:—me,—
  Who leap to love you. Lo,
I am all yours so utterly
  You need not speak, nor show

One sign, but I shall understand
Out to our life's last rim:
Out into death's uncertain land,
Gracious be it or grim.

I am all yours. . . . And yet tonight
The old trick haunts me. Look!
I see your face, O new delight,
As in a picture-book.

Your face, your shape, the fire-lit room,
The red rose on the shelf,—
And, leaning to its passionate bloom,
Troubled with love, myself. . . .

Oh, hold your hand across my eyes.
They have no right to see!
But now, as then, they are too wise.
They stare. They frighten me.

'SOUL!—SOUL!'

It will do no good to lie.
Hold your eye-lids wide. Look straight.
Stare . . . Stare . . . Nor deny
The hard dim thing you hate.

This is you, alone and old. . . .
Yes,—she has no loveliness.
Yes,—she stumbles and is cold
In that thick black dress.

Say not, 'She is none of mine,—
Husk of a life unloved, unknown.'
Stare . . . Stare . . . Learn each line
Of fading for your own.

You,—who sit behind the eyes,
Juggling life and judging death,
Too immortal and too wise
To fail with failing breath,—

Soul!—Soul!—Voyager
Of wild unclaimed Eternity!—
Face her! Never pity her!
You alone can set her free!

THE NARROW DOORS

The Wide Door into Sorrow
Stands open night and day
With head held high and dancing feet
I pass it on my way.

I never tread within it.
I never turn to see,
The Wide Door into Sorrow
It cannot frighten me.

The Narrow Doors to Sorrow
Are secret, still, and low:
Swift tongues of dusk that spoil the sun
Before I even know.

My dancing feet are frozen.
I stare, I can but see.
The Narrow Doors to Sorrow
They stop the heart in me.

—Oh, stranger than my midnights
Of loneliness and strife
The Doors that let the dark leap in
Across my sunny life!

SUCH THINGS ARE FAR AWAY

'Why, . . . even while your hair is red
Perhaps you will be dead. . . .
And must I keep the house alone
When you are old . . . and dead . . .?'
Quick-grown
The shadowy mortal seeds I threw
Into your garden, young and new! . . .

With troubled darling eyes,—
A smile that halfway sighs
Under your curly thatch,—you tear
The sureness from me, stabbed aware
That though I laugh at you
Such dreams come starkly true.

For even while my hair is red
God knows, I might be dead. . . .
Or I might lie, too faint and old
Even to love you, even to scold,
And let you keep the house alone
When you are tall and grown. . . .

Should I have let you learn
The dim words Death and Age?—the stern

Old mortal facts?—Should you have seen
The cedar wax-wing's grave turn green
Under the lilac? . . . Yes . . .
Truth is no torturess. . . .

But now, I only laugh, and say,
'Such things are far, oh, far away'—
I rub your curls against my cheek,
And say, 'The Circus comes this week!
And there might be a skating bear,
And white Arabian horses there;
And pop-corn, and balloons,
Gold, purple, scarlet moons,—
And great wise elephants,
And dogs that count and dance,
And cow-boys! We shall see!'

So your eyes shine at me,
Once more unfrozen by a fear. . . .

For oh, you are so young, my dear!
So helpless and so gay, to know
True things like these, and speak them so,
One small hand on my knee,
And clear eyes trusting me. . . .

And I—what can I say?—
'Such things are far,—oh, far away!'

A TINY SPANGLE OF AUTUMN

I will sit here, low, while the sun is hot. on a flat
warm stone:
To be near lichens and mosses and a pale last
bluet the frost has left alone.

A mullein, with soft fur crumpled, beaver-color,
is taller than I.
I am near the star of a thistle's leaves, and a cleft
where crickets cry.

If I hold back my head, a barberry bush spills
scarlet into my eyes.
I am small, small, small, under my body's old
stiff disguise.

I am humbly bright as a partridge berry, light as a
midge, sun-lost:
A tiny spangle of earth and autumn, waiting night-
fall and frost.

THE GENTLE WOOD

Shall I string me barberries,
  Bead on red-hot bead?
Shall I stuff a lacy bag
  With silver thistle seed?
Shall I weave a wild green crown
  Of creepy wandering pine?
Or catch a glossy cricket
  And tame him for mine?—

Large I sit, and clumsy
  By the faint wood-path.
But the wood is gracious
  From frost's sweet aftermath:
Pardons me, too human,
  With gentle golden ease;
Drops a tight burr, and a jay's
  Blue feather on my knees.

O sweet wood to bear with me,
  Cycled not as you!—
You, whom life and death make wise
  With endless frost and dew.
O sweet wood to bear with me,—
  Trusting less than one
Little twisted golden leaf
  That drifts through the sun!

TRYSTS

My Father and my Mother sleep
Under the snow and dead rose-stem.
Not once in many months I keep
A tryst in that still place with them.

Their faces from my walls look out.
Not many times I sigh and stay
To speak with them, or turn about,
Whispering, "How excellent were they!"

But green-speared, gold-tubed daffodils
Make my cold windows shout with spring.
Leaning across the lovely sills
My Mother helps my harvesting.

And when I sit in the sun and mend,
She plies the needle, telling me
Deep thoughts that make me more her friend
Than little foolish daughters be.

In church, the high dim pulpit blurs.
My Father's eyes burn dark and proud.
I know their dreams. His spirit stirs
Unspent across the careless crowd. . . .

My Father and my Mother sleep
Under the snow and dead rose-stem.
They do not wonder why I keep
No tryst in that still place with them.

Smiling, they pass and touch my hand.
"Child! Child!—At last you understand!"

WHY DO YOU FIND ME STRANGE?

Why do you find me strange, because I make
Quiet provision of my soul for years?—
I should be stranger if I thought to take
That swift inevitable voyage with tears,—
Tears and dry memories for only store.—
Needs one to set no compass, learn no chart,
Swing to those baffling twilit tides before
One has a single starry course by heart?

(Not by one weft of cloud less blue the air;
Not by one lagging wave less full the tide:
Because I know how far away I fare
From reckless roadsteads where my tall sails ride.)

Why do you find me strange, because I know
With certain keel, I go,—as all ships go?

CLEARNESS

I have loved clearness. . . . Sea-tide over shoal;
Sky before sun-rise, purer than its star;
Green light of ferns; a spring's steep silvery bowl;
Blue halo of a candle-flame; the far
White emptiness round midnight moons. . . .
All these
I have loved, hoarding.
And clear simple minds;
Children with thoughts they do not know are dreams;
Men with straight eyes that no bad shadow blinds;
Women whose laughter has no barb. . . . It seems
Such are most precious of Life's largesses.

Only the blurred and tangled things I fear. . . .
O Death, I shall not care how strange you seem,—
How far from Life,—if you are only clear:—
Not the sick crowded darkness of a dream,
But clear,—clear,—clear,—like dawn's cold verities!—

IV

GOOD-BYE!

My Songs have run away from me,
  As foxes run across a hill;
As sea-gulls' wings behind the sea
  Follow the west wind's will.

O Songs, and will you come again? . . .
. . . Why should we come, now you are gay?
We were your jesters in the rain;
  We danced your dark away.

But now, you have no need of us.
  Your heart is bold with joy. We fly
To other hearts more tremulous,
  More starved and dim. . . . Good-bye!

THE FIREPLACE

Once my hearth was red and bare,
A cold unproven thing.
—A thousand fires warmed me there,
Lonely and wondering.

Flame-flushed, dreaming, all alone,
Dreaming far,—so far.—
A thousand fires, well-shared, have blown
My dreams beyond a star.

Never any spark comes back,
Nor dream drifts home to sleep.
But love lights fires that cold dreams lack,
And hides them deep,—ah, deep!—

A thousand fires for loneliness;
For love, a thousand more.
—O hearth, be secret, nor confess
Too loud, life's throbbing score! . . .

SONG

But I was gone a hundred years,
A million miles from you;
Although the iris by the path
Still marches tall and blue.

Although the little bluebird's house
Still holds its treasure tight; . . .
Oh, dusty centuries have dragged
Till I came home tonight!

And there is nothing under space
So good as this,—to see
Our yellow fire-shine, and your face,—
Clear light to welcome me!

LOVE HAS SHINING EYES

I had read, and had been told
By the bitter young and the brave scarred old,—
'Love is a great and terrible thing.
A thorn-crown and a struggling.
Love is keen and cruel and deep.
Love will make you weep.' . . .

I loved you, and I knew your road
Was mine, however strange it showed.

Yet I thought, 'I go to a wound,
A cross, a battle.' . . . This I found,—
That April sun on a wet hill-slope,
And the sea-wind's challenging and quest,
And a child's eyes, and a dream's hope,
And after the day's work, long, long rest,—
And a flame of wonder, far and sure,
And a singing quietness . . . all these
Are less than the least you make secure
Of life's bright longings and mysteries. . . .

I shall say, 'They lied! They lied!
Look! Am I broken and crucified?

Love is a great proud glistening thing,
A trumpet-cry and a triumphing.
And Love is quiet and close and wise.
Love has shining eyes.'

Why has their sorrow more right to cry
What Love is than I? . . . than I? . . .

SOMETIMES WE HARDLY WANTED YOU

Sometimes we hardly wanted you,
  Our days together were so rare;
Hill-tops, brook-hollows, and the blue
  Castles of windless sunny air;
Camp-fires by certain secret springs,
  Green trails that only we could trace:—
Love made us misers of these things.
  And you, still wandering in space,
Little and lone and undiscerned,—
  We did not know we needed you. . . .

Strange! For your bright warm self is burned
  Into our hearts, till all that blue
Of morning and pearl-mist of night,
  Wind, water, sun,—those secret ways,—
Mean you:—our youth and lovely light:
  Our laughter and our length of days!

LONELY JOY

O do not dance and do not shine,
Heart,—simple laughing heart of mine!
Only a child should dare to be
So very gay, so very free:
Only a child or an April hill
Should tremble so with joy, and fill
So deep the pools of secret peace. . . .

What God decreed my long release
From care and bitterness, and gave
No need for being proud, and brave?
What God, capricious, on my head
Such private sparkling sunlight shed?

. . . Oh that in April, when the floods
Roar down the river, and the buds
Of daffodil and lilac swell,
I might be free at last to tell
That even now, the world to me
Is flaming, murmuring glamoury:—
I might be free to laugh, unwise,
And startled with the old surprise;
The old refusal of all grief
Before the lure of wing and leaf!—

Oh that in April I might sing,
'But I—I have not asked one thing
Life has not given!'—and to dare
Set free my gladness like the flare
Of bright flags on a holiday . . .

That were a cruel, careless way. . . .

Heart, lonely in your lightness, keep
Your great joy secret as your sleep!
Only to one who seems as gay
Confide it carefully. But stay
If one least jealous shadow slips
Across her eyes, or draws her lips.—
Run like the wind! Be dumb! Lest she
Ache, envying you hungrily.

But, coming home, in some still place
Let loose the shining of your face.
Keep safe for one who loves you most
The high tumultuous equal boast!—

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